

# ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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## School-job hopeful sees good fit (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — Larry Smith, the White Hall School District's education chief, said the requirements for the top job in the North Little Rock School District seem to match up with the skills he's honed in his 24-year career.

Smith is one of five candidates for the North Little Rock superintendent's job now held by Ken Kirspe, who plans to retire from the 9,000-student district at the end of this school year.

The North Little Rock School Board interviewed Smith in a private session Wednesday night.

Bobby Acklin, the North Little Rock district's assistant superintendent for desegregation, and Rhonda Dickey, the district's director of secondary education, were interviewed by the board last week.

The remaining finalists - Belinda Shook, superintendent of the Beebe School District, and Kelly Rodgers, superintendent of the Terrell, Texas, Independent School District - will be interviewed today and Friday, respectively.

Smith, 49, is in his sixth year as superintendent in White Hall. He was asked last year by a recruiter to apply to the North Little Rock school system, a district in the early stages of a \$266 million school construction and renovation program that affects nearly every campus.

"It's close to home for me, since I grew up in central Arkansas," Smith told the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette. "I looked at some of the information about the district and what they are doing and it fits into areas where I have had a lot of experience."

He specifically listed those areas as construction, budgeting and curriculum.

The Benton native, who is a former assistant superintendent in the Bryant School District, helped design, staff and put into operation the state's first LEED-certified school building - a middle school. He also worked on the designs of Bryant's Hurricane Creek Elementary and the new Benton High School.

"I'll be pretty much eyes on, hands on" when it comes to construction in North Little Rock, Smith said. "You have to know what you are getting."

At the 3,000-student White Hall district, Smith spearheaded a 17-room addition and remodeling of the high school, an effort that required the district to push for a \$180,000 settlement with the contractor over construction delays.

"We did get what we were paying for at the end of the day," he said. "We did get what we thought was a quality product."

The building changes in White Hall resulted in the reconfiguration of grades that included moving the ninth grade to the high school. The North Little Rock building program also will result in grade reconfigurations over the next few years.

And North Little Rock, like all Arkansas school districts, is putting in place curriculum based on the new national education standards.

Smith said curriculum and instruction were his “bread and butter” when he became an administrator. He did his doctoral dissertation on the use of block scheduling at the middle school level. And, as a principal in Kenosha, Wis., from 1999 to 2001, his middle school was part of a classroom-instruction research project headed by national education author Robert Marzano.

“I had the opportunity to go back and forth to Denver several times and sit across the table from him and a lot of other folks who were well respected in curriculum and instruction to talk about how to implement things effectively,” Smith said.

“Most everything in education right now is based in some measure on work Marzano has done. He’s probably the leading researcher as far as what works in schools in instruction and leadership.”

Smith, who heads a district with a \$25 million annual budget, said he learned about budgeting from two former superintendents renowned for their expertise: Richard Abernathy, now the executive director of the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators, and the late Charles Dyer, former superintendent of the Alma School District.

With an eye toward keeping the White Hall district solvent, Smith recently recommended, and a split School Board approved, closing the district’s Redfield Middle School next year, over the objections of some Redfield residents.

Closing a 122-student school that would cost at least \$3.5 million to modernize is the most contentious issue Smith said he has faced since becoming the White Hall chief.

“When I came here, White Hall had had three years of deficit spending in a row. We started making adjustments then.”

That included eliminating 18 certified positions and increasing class sizes. Still, the district has lost some 200 students in recent years, which translates to about \$1.2 million in lost revenue.

“We had done everything we could do to tighten up here and there on individual campuses,” Smith said. “The only thing left was to go to a bigger scale,” which meant closing a campus.

Noel Foster has worked with Smith, first as police chief and now as White Hall mayor. And Foster has a child in what he said is “a wonderful school district.”

“Dr. Smith has done us a great job,” Foster said Wednesday. “I’d hate to see him go.”

Foster complimented Smith for his money-managing ability, his willingness to communicate with city leaders, his foresight in improving school facilities, and his commitment to school safety as demonstrated by the fact that there are police officers working at the elementary, middle and high schools.

"He's very smart," Foster said. "He has a great team - his assistant superintendents and teachers. He's very good at managing and directing and cutting fat. And sometimes that is not easy."

Smith, a 1982 graduate of Benton High, has bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Central Arkansas and a doctorate in educational administration from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

He started his career as a high school English and speech teacher at Clarendon High, and taught one year in the former Parkin School District. Then he became the junior high principal and federal programs director in the former Elaine School District.

Smith went on to be middle school principal in Bearden, 1995-97; in Alma, 1997-99; and in Kenosha, Wis., 1999-2001. He returned to Arkansas to be high school principal in the Paris School District, and then he followed Paris Superintendent Richard Abernathy to the Bryant School District, where Smith was assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction from 2003-07.

Smith and his wife, Marty, an administrative assistant at the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators, have three children - a son who is a high school senior, a daughter who is a junior and a son in the eighth grade.

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### **Little Rock School District asking parents if they support armed guards at school (KTHV-Channel 11)**

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (KTHV) - Putting armed guards in schools has been a much-discussed topic since the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December.

After the mass shooting, which killed 26 people including 20 children, the National Rifle Association announced its support for having armed officers in every school in the country.

Last week, President Barack Obama endorsed a plan that would put armed guards in schools that want them. This week, Little Rock School District is trying to gather opinions from parents on whether they would like to have armed guards at their school.

Parents with children at elementary schools in the city said their children were sent home with surveys this week. The survey asked if parents support the idea.

Robert Jones is the Security Director for the District.

"The goal as far as the armed security officers is to have an armed security officer in all of our installations where we do not have police officers working," Jones said.

Currently there are 18 police officers in the high schools and middle schools in Little Rock Schools.

The district would be considering at least 31 armed guards divided amongst the elementary schools.

"There is a cost of approximately \$1,500 to start the program to train it and buy the weapon and then it drops dramatically to about \$300 a year for the retraining and the certification," Jones added.

On Wednesday afternoon, parents picking up their kids at King Magnet Elementary weighed in on the topic.

"I think that's an excellent idea as far as placing armed guards in the schools. And mainly the elementary schools and the junior high schools, I think that would be a great idea," said Jermaine Johnson.

Monica Simpson is the mother of a fourth grader and agrees, but adds the school already has precautions in place.

"Anyone that enters the school does have to come through the front. So they do have to pass the principal, the secretary and the registrar to get in, so I think they've already taken precaution," Simpson said.

Security Director Jones says it will take at least three months from the time the school board approves the measure for the guards to be trained and in place.

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### **Bill would allow schools to make innovative decisions (KTHV-Channel 11)**

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (KTHV) -- Arkansas schools with bright ideas may have more leeway to bring those to life.

Senator Joyce Elliott, D-Little Rock, said many districts in Arkansas have lost the joy of education, and she proposed getting it back through creating districts of innovation.

The general concept according to Elliot is to allow school districts to submit innovation plans with new and creative teaching techniques to the state. If approved, the districts may be able to go outside current rules with curriculum in order to be more engaging.

Senator Elliot said schools would be able to submit their ideas surrounding curriculum or time restraints.

"We have traditional schools, and we have traditional rules, and this is designed so that everything, every school district if you have a brilliant idea and you want to do things differently from what the rules say," said Elliot. "We have to now that you might actually get an exemption from the commissioner to do that. To be responsive to the folks in your locality."

The bill calls for parent and educator support, and if a district is approved by the state, it will have the "innovative" label for five years. It is currently pending in the education committee for a financial impact study.

Senator Elliot also said more than 90 percent of Arkansas students go to public schools, and she wants this bill to give them the best opportunity for advanced education.

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### **After 40 Years, West Memphis School District Searching for New Superintendent (KARK-TV)**

(Video of report is available at <http://www.abc24.com/news/local/story/After-40-Years-West-Memphis-Searching-for-New/p0FRfgG8dUuNEYP09fvnPA.cspix>)

The West Memphis School Board is searching for a new superintendent for the first time in more than 40 years.

Superintendent Bill Kessinger submitted his resignation in a special meeting Tuesday night.

The move took many residents and even board members by surprise.

According to employees with West Memphis Schools, Kessinger is in Little Rock and will not comment at this time.

School Board Member Angela Eason says she was called a few days ago about a special board meeting Tuesday night but had no idea what it was about. "He never mentioned it," she says, "We had Christmas dinner, he never mentioned it, then all of a sudden this Tuesday night, it caught me by surprise."

Eason says Kessinger wasn't at the meeting. Another school employee broke the news. "I was really concerned about why and his reason for resigning," she says, "but they only said, 'due to his age,' that's all we were informed."

Eason questions the timing. She says recent financial debates and contention among select board members have been brewing. "That may be some of the reason, because it's very heated now," says Eason.

Regardless the reason, for the first time in 40 years West Memphis will begin a superintendent search and Kessinger will begin a life without school.

The board will hold a special meeting Monday to discuss the new superintendent search.

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### **Changes planned for GED tests (Greenwood Democrat)**

Arkansas may stop administering the General Education Development test at no charge to students next year, along with other changes, the program's state administrator said Thursday.

In January 2014 the national GED Testing Service and its new partner, the education and testing company Pearson, will make several changes to the test, including compiling and providing to students a report showing their proficiency in various academic skills. The report is intended to help guide students as they pursue post-secondary education or a new job by highlighting their strengths and areas that need improvement.

"The new test will cost more money than Arkansas has traditionally been able to absorb, therefore, some of the test's costs may be borne by the student in the future," said Janice Hanlon, Arkansas' GED administrator.

She said the cost to students remains to be seen, but it could be as high as \$120.

Also, students will take the new test on a computer instead of using pencil and paper.

"Basic computer literacy is a must for most anyone who hopes to get a job or advance in today's work environment. Our adult education centers are already helping their students with computer literacy and will incorporate those skills into their GED preparation classes," Hanlon said.

Hanlon said the likely need to begin charging test takers is not related to the switch from paper to computers .

The test also will be updated to reflect the new Common Core academic standards.

People who have taken the current test, but not passed all five parts, have until the end of 2013 to pass or they will need to start over again in 2014 with the new test to obtain their GED diploma, Hanlon said.

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## **Campus violence drills needed, lawmakers say (Greenwood Democrat)**

Students and teachers across the state should participate in drills to prepare them to react to campus violence, just as they do to prepare for tornadoes and fires, a state lawmaker said Tuesday.

Sen. Missy Irvin, R-Mountain View, said she is drafting legislation to require such drills.

"I believe students and faculty should be prepared to handle an incident of campus violence," she said. "My legislation would require drills, at least annually, similar to the way tornado drills are carried out."

Irvin said she has been meeting with officials of the state Department of Education and the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators and has received input from organizations representing sheriffs and police chiefs.

She said the state Criminal Justice Institute, a part of the University of Arkansas system, has a program available to instruct school faculty and students on how to prepare for incidents of school violence.

"What I am trying to do is get that onto all the campuses, and I am trying to find the funding," she said, adding she doesn't want to pass an unfunded mandate.

Ideally, Irvin said, she would prefer that every school have a school resource officer, a law enforcement officer who works at the school.

Many schools across the state have such officers, who generally are paid by the local police department or by the police department and the school district.

"I support school resource officers if (school districts) have the funds to do that," Irvin said. "That's a local issue and many local cities and counties offer some financial support for that, which I very much support."

Cheryl May, director of the Criminal Justice Institute, said CJ's safe school initiative has been available for four years and has provided training to help some school resources officers across the state.

Irvin said she decided to work on the legislation after the Dec. 14 tragedy in Newtown, Conn., when one of her school-age children expressed concern about not knowing what to do in a situation like that.

Twenty children and six adults were shot and killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown by a man with automatic weapons who forced his way into the school.

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## **ES school district closes doors to fend off the flu (The Citizen, Eureka Springs)**

On Wednesday, the Eureka Springs School District announced it would close its doors Thursday and Friday and through the weekend to fight off the flu as nearly 30 percent of the student body was out sick.

"As of this morning we had 67 students out of 225 or so sick, plus 10 staff out," said Superintendent Curtis Turner on Tuesday afternoon. "Normally when you hit about 20 percent of students and staff sick, the best thing to do is close down and disinfect everything and give it a chance to work itself out."

This past weekend, the school disinfected the elementary building with antibacterial foggers, and the building was aired out on Sunday.

"Shutting down for just one day won't do any good," Turner said. "We are shutting down Thursday and Friday, so the break would go on through the weekend, and we'll come in and disinfect again."

Turner said while there was no set policy about percentages of illness that requires shutting down, 20 percent sick for the school overall was the number they watched for.

#### Flu cases up locally and abroad

A strain of the influenza virus, H3n2, is causing 98 percent of the flu viruses being reported throughout the state, according to a statement by the Arkansas Department of Health last week. The ADH has received numerous reports of infections, hospitalizations and intensive care unit admissions.

According to Cindy Selover, Director of the Emergency Department at Mercy Hospital Berryville, the number of flu patients the past month or so has been well above normal. "On average we don't really get many flu patients if any," she said. "But the past month we've had up to 10 patients a day sick."

Selover described the problem as a "huge increase" that seems to include both two strains of the virus, Type A (H3n2) and Type B. The flu vaccination is only effective against the Type A virus, and Selover said it is possible to get the flu even with the flu shot, but that symptoms seem much milder for those who have taken the shot.

"It is best to see a doctor the sooner the better once the symptoms appear, especially fever," Selover added. "Fever, all over aches, cough, congestion, runny nose. We have had great success with the popular prescription flu treatment Tamiflu, but it only works if you get it in the first 48 hours of being sick, so don't wait."

Dr. Shannon Card of Mercy Clinic in Berryville said he has seen an influx of patients suffering from the influenza virus in the past few weeks.

"Last year was not as bad a season for the flu virus, but this year there are definitely more cases than normal," he said. "People should know that there are plenty of other colds out there and not everything is the flu. We have seen patients with the common cold, respiratory infections, and Norovirus, which is a stomach virus that causes vomiting, and diarrhea -- but we have seen more flu-related illnesses than usual."

#### People encouraged to get flu shots

"The truth is most people that get the flu aren't going to the doctor, they just stay home until they aren't ill anymore," said Ed Barham, ADH public information officer. "This means that we can never really know all the statistics."

"Almost everyone should get the vaccination -- pregnant mothers really should get it; some of the immunity is passed along to the infant," he said. "It is very serious for pregnant women; they could deliver a child during the flu season and if they didn't have the shot, their child is more susceptible to contracting the virus, which can cause serious effects and possibly death to the infant."

Although Health Department officials are encouraging people to get a flu shot, some in the medical field in Carroll County have said they don't think this year's flu vaccine is doing its job.

"I have heard that the shot wasn't helping people," said Jim Shell, pharmacist at Poyner Drug. "Some of the people that have got the shot are still getting the flu."

The 2012-2013 flu season is just now reaching its peak, and because there is a particularly aggressive strain of the flu, it could continue to infect people into early spring, officials said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said last week that Arkansas is among a few states in the Southeast in which flu cases spread less rapidly in the prior week, but a state Health Department spokesman said it's too early to say cases have peaked here. At least nine people have died from the flu so far in Arkansas, including one child.

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### **School choice bill would make desegregation goal, not mandate (Pine Bluff Commercial)**

LITTLE ROCK — Racial desegregation would remain a legislative goal, though not a mandate, in legislation filed Wednesday to replace a state law that placed racial restrictions on where students could attend school.

Other bills filed Wednesday would create a grant program for open-enrollment charter schools and allow financial institutions to create savings accounts that would be linked to the state lottery.

A federal judge struck down the Arkansas School Choice Act last year after a group of parents challenged the anti-segregation provision.

Senate Bill 114 by Sen. Joyce Elliott, D-Little Rock, would rewrite the Arkansas Public School Choice Act of 1989 with a set of guidelines for school districts and school boards to use when considering a student's request to transfer between districts.

Under Elliott's bill, a school district could seek an exemption from the school choice law if officials believed transfers could lead to segregation.

Last week, Sen. Johnny Key, R-Mountain Home, filed SB 65, which would remove race as a factor in deciding whether students can transfer between districts.

Key's proposal was filed on the same day that the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis heard oral arguments in appeals of last year's ruling that struck down Arkansas' school choice law.

U.S. District Judge Robert T. Dawson said in June that a race-based provision in the 1989 law violates the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees equal protection under the law.

Key, chairman of the Senate Education Committee, said Wednesday he hopes to present his bill in the committee in early February.

Dawson ruled in a lawsuit filed in 2010 by a group of parents of white children attending the Malvern School District after they denied permission to transfer to the Magnet Cove School District. At the time, the Malvern district's enrollment was about 60 percent white and the Magnet Cove district was about 95 percent white.

The state had argued that the race-based provision in the state statute was needed to preserve desegregation efforts.



Also filed Wednesday, SB 117 by Sen. David Burnett, D-Osceola, would create a grant program for open-enrollment charter schools.

Under the bill, the state Division of Arkansas Public School Academic Facilities and Transportation would administer a program to which open-enrollment charter schools could apply for state-funded grants.

The schools could use the grants to build, renovate and maintain facilities; acquire property; buy supplies; and pay off debts.

The grant program would be open only to charter schools that have been in existence for at least five years, provide transportation to their students, have a student body with at least 60 percent of students on the National School Lunch Program, and are considered academically successful by the state Department of Education.

SB 119 by Sen. Robert Thompson, D-Paragould, would allow financial institutions to create savings accounts that would be linked to the state lottery.

Under the bill, a customer who deposits a certain amount — not less than \$25 — into a prize-linked savings account would be entered in a lottery game and become eligible to win prizes. The state lottery would create the game specifically for the financial institutions.

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### **Arkansas Legislature: Senate OKs Spending Bill; Sex Offender Bills Advance (Southwest Times Record)**

LITTLE ROCK — An appropriation bill from which cost-of-living adjustments for judges and prosecutors were removed last week cleared the Senate on Wednesday and heads to the governor for his signature.

House Bill 1024, the General Appropriation Bill which sets the funding level for constitutional officers, judges, prosecutors and legislators, passed in the Senate in a 33-0 vote, a day after it passed in the House.

The Joint Budget Committee last week removed a 2 percent cost-of-living adjustment for judges and prosecutors from the bill. Legislative leaders said they want to consider the question of whether to grant COLAs to all state employees later in the session.

Sen. Larry Teague, D-Nashville, co-chairman of the budget committee, said he expects lawmakers to consider the COLAs for all state employees, including judges and prosecutors, later this session. He said he didn't think the Legislature would support COLAs for constitutional officers or legislators.

"As soon as we get to those bills, we'll be talking about it," he said, adding that he wasn't sure if the COLAs would be 2 percent or less. "I don't know where we're at on that; I remain optimistic that (they) we will get a COLA."

#### **Veterans Home Bill**

Elsewhere Wednesday, a bill to create a new veterans' home to replace the closed Little Rock Veterans Home received an endorsement Wednesday from the House Committee on Aging, Children and Youth, Legislative and Military Affairs.

HB 1013 by Rep. John Edwards, D-Little Rock, would direct the state Department of Veterans Affairs to establish and maintain a new home for veterans at a location to be determined by the department's director, after the director seeks advice from the state Veterans' Commission. The home would have up to 150 beds and would replace the Little Rock facility that was closed in November because of safety concerns and financial problems.

The state now has only one veterans' home, in Fayetteville. Edwards, an Iraq War veteran, said it is important to have another home for veterans who want to live in it.

"If you don't want to live there, live wherever you want to live," he said. "If you want to live in a private facility, great. If you want to live in your own home, you can stay in your own home. But if we're going to have a place for these men and women, then let's make it a good place."

Edwards estimated the cost to build the facility at \$21 million. He said that under a U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs program, the federal government would provide 65 percent of the cost if the state can provide 35 percent. He said he plans to file a separate appropriation bill for the project.

Edwards was asked what would happen if Congress chose not to fund the Department of Veteran Affairs' program.

"I think there's a lot of support from our federal legislative leadership" for the program, he said. "If the federal money were not in place, then ultimately the state money would not be obligated."

The bill goes to the House.

The same committee also endorsed SB 7 by Sen. Eddie Williams, R-Cabot, which would allow spouses of personnel stationed at military installations in Arkansas to transfer any professional licenses or degrees in health care or education they might have in other states.

The bill, which passed previously in the Senate, advances to the House.

#### Sex-Offender Bill

The Senate Judiciary Committee on Wednesday endorsed a measure that would ban some sex offenders from swimming areas and children's playgrounds at state parks.

SB 12 by Sen. Missy Irvin, R-Mountain View, would prohibit level 3 or 4 sex offenders from being at a swimming area or a children's playground in a state park, but would allow them to visit other areas in state parks.

Irvin said the bill expands on Act 816 of 2011, which prohibited level 3 or 4 sex offenders from being at city-owned swimming areas or water parks.

Richard Davies, director of the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism, spoke for the measure.

"We felt like we needed to do something because whether right or wrong, the playground, swimming pool or the beach are often where children are left by parents unattended, for the most part," Davies said.

Speaking against the bill were Lynn Gilmore, CEO of Sex Offender Solutions and Education Network, and Carla Swanson, executive director of Arkansas Time After Time, an organization that works to help sex offenders who have served their prison time adjust to society.

"I know that many sex offenders have families, and when you punish a sex offender you not only punish them, you punish that family member," Gilmore said. "I know many Level 3 and Level 4 sex offenders that do have families and they just simply made a mistake in their past and they're trying to get on with their life, trying to find work and housing."

Sen. Gary Stubblefield, R-Branch, told Gilmore he wasn't concerned about the sex offender's family.

"I'm a little concerned about the victim and their families," he said.

The bill now goes to the Senate.

The committee also endorsed SB 56 by Sen. Jon Woods, R-Springdale, which would require out-of-state sex offenders to pay the \$250 fee to register as a sex offender in Arkansas.

The bill goes to the Senate.

Short Week

House and Senate leaders announced Wednesday that both chambers would not meet Friday, giving lawmakers a three-day weekend.

The Legislature had a four-day weekend last week because they didn't meet Friday and Monday was the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

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## **The state of our state (Column by Governor Beebe – Little River News)**

This week, the members of the 89th Arkansas General Assembly convened, bringing many new faces to the State Capitol. While leadership and membership are much different than past sessions, these coming months will still be filled with weighty challenges, solemn responsibilities and unique opportunities.

I delivered my State of the State address as the session began. I reiterated that my top priorities remain education and economic development, and I am pleased that we've made many accomplishments in both areas. We will continue making the improvements to our schools that have dramatically improved our national ranking. We remain focused on bringing new jobs and investment to Arkansas, and I plan to ask for the Legislature's help to bring in one of the biggest projects our State has ever seen. I also am proposing legislation that will put a mechanism in place to make the final cut in the sales tax on groceries when funding becomes available.

My proposed balanced budget covers a wide range of important state services, but it's clear that Medicaid will be the highest-profile issue this session. Arkansas faces a significant Medicaid shortfall. My proposed budget includes new, ongoing revenue and one-time surplus funds to help address the shortfall, but it's not going to be enough to completely bridge the gap.

The vast majority of Arkansans who currently receive Medicaid services are either elderly nursing-home residents, disabled adults or children insured by ARKids First. Any potential cuts will adversely affect real people, fellow Arkansans who depend on those services that we provide. There may still be tough choices ahead.

Separate from these Arkansans who already receive Medicaid, we have an opportunity this session to offer low-income, working Arkansans an option for health insurance through Medicaid. The federal government will cover the entire cost of insuring these Arkansans for three years, beginning in 2014. The State share of their insurance will reach 10 percent in 2020. However, other savings and the hundreds of millions of federal dollars added to our economy every year are expected to minimize the impact on our general-revenue budget.

If we have no insurance options available for our low-income workers, while more and more other states add those options through expanding Medicaid, it will make us less business-friendly in comparison. Also of economic concern are the 40,000 Arkansans employed by hospitals in our State, and the tens of thousands more who work in other areas of health care. Many of these workers are seeing their hospitals struggle under increased financial pressure. Arkansans without insurance coverage still seek care, often in emergency rooms. The cost of uncompensated care is eventually passed along to insured Arkansans. A 2009 study found that Arkansas families with health insurance pay an estimated \$1,500 in their premiums every year to treat the uninsured.

Expanded Medicaid can reduce uncompensated care and relieve this hidden tax we all pay. It can give 250,000 Arkansans the chance to lead healthier, more productive lives. It can help keep hospitals open and operational, and it will create additional private-sector health-care jobs. The choice whether we say yes will be left to the General Assembly.

As our legislators address Medicaid and others challenges Arkansas faces, I stand ready to work with them to keep our State on the path of progress. We all stand on the shoulders of the leaders who came before us and we will be writing the history that inspires those who come after. Together, we will continue providing our people opportunities to find prosperity, support and peace of mind.